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Swiss skiers on the podium

Top-class performances by Didier Cuche helped lift the Swiss alpine skiing team to third position in the FIS Nations Cup at the start of the season. The man from Neuchâtel has found his way back to the podium. Cuche twice finished second in the downhill, taking him just one place from the top in the overall World Cup standings. That's reason enough for a rousing "Hopp Schwyz!" for the opening of a promising winter season.

Farewell to Regazzoni

Gianclaudio "Clay" Regazzoni, one of the best Formula 1 racing drivers of the 1970s, was killed in a car crash near Parma in Italy on 15 December. He was 67. Regazzoni's motor racing career came to an abrupt end at the US Grand Prix West in Long Beach, California in 1980, when a serious accident



left him paralysed from the waist down. After signing with the Ferrari team in 1970, Regazzoni was the runner-up in the 1974 world driver's championship. In all, the Ticino-born driver finished on the podium 28 times and won five Grand Prix races.

European curling champions

Switzerland won the gold medal at the European Curling Championships in Basel. The men's team from Baden Regio (AG) led by Andreas Schwaller swept away a Scottish side in the final. Switzerland last won the European title in 1986.

Madam President

Micheline Calmy-Rey has been elected to succeed Moritz Leuenberger as the Swiss president in 2007. She has been the country's foreign minister since 2002. The second female president in Swiss history is a socialist politician from Geneva, just like former Federal Councillor Ruth Dreifuss, who was president in 1999.

Doris Leuthard goes to Washington

Economics Minister Doris Leuthard has made her first official visit to Washington. There she met US Trade Representative Susan Schwab and Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns. Talks focussed on the Swiss-American trade forum, possible investment, and negotiations relating to the World Trade Organisation. The US administration has authorised Swiss companies to help with reconstruction in one of the areas devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

Crédit Suisse Sports Awards

Roger Federer was named Swiss Sportsman of the Year for the third time, having already won the award in 2003 and 2004. Federer recently became only the second player in tennis history to win 90 matches in a single year, 24 years after Ivan Lendl managed the feat. Snowboarding Olympic champion Tanja Frieden was voted Sportswoman of the Year.

The rich are getting richer

The 300 largest private or family-held assets in Switzerland are worth a combined CHF 455 billion. That represents an increase of 14% over 2005. The Confederation's 118 billionaires also include a newcomer: recently-retired Formula 1 racing driver Michael Schumacher.



Politics through the eyes of the people

According to a survey by Univox, 84% of the Swiss believe that politicians knowingly make promises that they cannot keep. Fully 86% think that politicians do not listen to the people at all. Nonetheless, more than three-quarters of respondents were of the opinion that Switzerland is in a position to tackle its problems. Only 54% of those polled in 1998 thought this was the case.

Lötschberg tunnel completed

In December, two test trains travelled through the new Lötschberg tunnel. The tunnel connects Frutigen (BE) with Raron (VS). At 34.6 kilometres, it is Switzerland's longest and the world's third-longest. Drilling began in 1999, and the railway tunnel is due to open right on schedule on 9 December 2007. Up to 200 trains a day will then pass through the tunnel.

Simon Ammann flying high

Simon Ammann, the double Olympic ski jumping champion in Salt Lake City in 2002, has his sights firmly set on reaching the podium again. He has regularly finished at the top in this season's World Cup competitions, with one win, two second places and two fourths. In mid-December he led the overall World Cup standings.

Of athletes and injuries

Every two minutes a Swiss athlete suffers an injury. Sport accounts for an average of 300,000 injuries and causes 135 deaths a year. This in turn incurs annual social and economic costs of CHF 2 billion. A report by the Swiss Bureau for the Prevention of Accidents shows that the sports most hazardous to your health (statistically speaking) are football, alpine skiing, cycling and snowboarding.

Postmen in the firing line

The Swiss Post Office is planning restructuring in a bid to save CHF 50 million a year. The most important change will involve cutting 500 jobs by the year 2008. The 2500 existing post offices are to be replaced by branches that can be managed by just 200. The Post Office wants to create up to 200 agencies that can be integrated into local grocery stores. Demonstrations against the moves were held in Neuchâtel, Lucerne and Lugano.

Series of earthquakes

Drilling for a geothermal power plant triggered an earthquake in Basel measuring 3.4 on the Richter Scale. The construction work has caused more than 36 minor earthquakes since early December, five of which measured somewhere between 2 and 3. The others were no higher than 1.5 on the scale.

Budget surplus

The Swiss Confederation finished the year 2006 with a surplus of CHF 4.3 billion, despite the fact that a deficit of CHF 697 million had been forecast. The positive outcome was down to a combination of economic recovery and extraordinary income of CHF 2.1 billion from the sale of Swisscom shares.

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